

Ordinary 21b: Friday
Faith Development Day

Chandos Pattison

30 August 2018

Dear Father Leo, Father Patrick, Father Lawrence, Father Alessandro,
Deacons Mike Boreham and Henk Luyten and dear administrators, staff
and teachers of the Catholic Independent Schools of the Vancouver
Archdiocese:

Introduction

It really is a great joy to be with you once again for this celebration of the Eucharist during the annual Faith Development Day. We come together to give thanks to the Lord for the great gift of the dedicated administrators, teachers and staff of the Catholic schools of our Archdiocese and to implore an outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that all that you do will begin with the good Lord's inspiration, continue with his saving help and find its fulfilment in him.

You are all integral to the great mission of the Church precisely as educators. That is your vocation, your calling. And not just singly or one by one. You are part of "evangelizing school communities which foster a personal relationship with Jesus in the family of the Church" – which is the very first priority of the strategic plan that we are striving to live out more fully every year.

You are on the front-lines in passing on the great treasure of our

Catholic faith to the young people entrusted to your care. Despite the challenges you face – and they are many – you remain enthusiastic and joyful educators. And for that, on behalf of all the priests and lay faithful of our local Church, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. No one is prouder than I am of the great schools we have in the Archdiocese and no one more grateful for the enormous contribution you are making to families, parishes, the wider Church and society as a whole.

Indeed, it is not difficult for me to make my own the words that the Apostle Paul addressed to the first generation of Christians in Corinth two thousand years ago: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind” (1 Cor 1:4-6).

Dear new teachers in our schools: you are joining colleagues who are not only dedicated and competent but also who are striving to communicate a vision of learning which aims “to guide students in the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness within the Catholic intellectual tradition.” A noble task which makes more exciting and ultimately more satisfying your vocation as an educator.

A Catholic World View

All education is dependent upon and communicates a world view, a way of looking at the world in which we live, whether that be

implicitly or explicitly. And Catholic education is no exception. Our world view is shaped by the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, and by the Gospel he proclaimed as it is handed down through the Church. But its educational and pedagogical value emerges only when teachers come to understand and appropriate this world view for themselves, once they experience the freedom and truth that comes from this understanding. This takes ongoing study, prayer, creativity, a willingness to learn from others and humility.

When this Catholic “sense” or “spirit” is grasped, then it becomes a means of passing on what is most valuable in helping our students to live life “to the full,” as Jesus himself wants us to do: “I have come that they may have life, and life to the full” (Jn 10:10). Indeed, coming to know him is “life.” To be an educator immersed in a Catholic “take” on reality means that in this age of moral turmoil you can give to the young what they need most: a firm ground secured by truth, life-giving values and meaning that only come from God. On Tuesday we celebrated the feast of St. Augustine, who once said: “Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in you.” Good educators, teachers in our CISVA schools, have the daunting responsibility of helping their students to expand their vision so that they can see the world as it really is: created by God, redeemed by the Death and Resurrection of his Son, and journeying towards its destiny under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Today's Gospel

Now allow me to switch gears to address, even if briefly, the word of God as it comes to us in today's Gospel, a word that contradicts every suggestion – and this is widespread in our own hearts and minds – that we should only live only for now, for this world, since heaven is said to be only an illusion on the one hand or a guarantee on the other.

It begins with a short parable which describes how people feel about break-ins. No one wants to have their home broken into and ransacked. Jesus observes that if the owner of the house had known that the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake to prevent his house being robbed. If a burglary happens to us, we often think “If only I had... done this or that to prevent the burglary.” This is Jesus' point. Be prepared so that you never have to say “if only.”

But what should we ultimately prepare for? The Scriptures are unequivocal: the coming of the Son who arrives “at an unexpected hour” (Mt 24:44). Curiously, Jesus compares himself to a thief. For a thief to break in is a bad thing, but Christ's arrival can only be a good thing. But – and here's the point – it is also a moment of judgment. Jesus is not threatening; he is just stating the facts. He is telling us the truth and is serious about it. After all, it is the truth that sets us free. A physician who fails to warn us that certain behaviours will cause sickness, even death, is not being “kind.” Rather, such failure to tell the truth is reckless. Jesus

doesn't want to hide the truth from us, which would surely be misplaced compassion.

Our responsibility is to be prepared, so that we “may be blameless on the day [the coming] of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8). And that day, we all know, is inevitable. Nor should we waste our time trying to predict it. More importantly, as the Lord says, we just have to be ready at every moment for his coming.

And how are we to do this? Through our lives lived in union with God, since, again to refer to St. Paul as we heard in the First Reading, by him [God] you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). This is the truly good news, the great news, that gives the right perspective to what we are doing and how we are living now.

Conclusion

To strengthen us on our way, to assure us we can “do all things in Christ Jesus who upholds us,” the Lord invites to this Banquet which he has prepared for us and in which he gives us himself.

_ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver